



15 July 2015

Prime Minister Tony Abbott  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to voice our growing concern about the effects on First Nations communities that are being targeted for forced closure by the Western Australian government.

We believe there is ample evidence from overseas and the Northern Territory that continued connection to traditional lands results in better overall health for First Nations People.

The forced removal of people from their lands leads often to increased homelessness, deeper poverty, crime, substance abuse, violence and mental health issues.

The closure of these communities will create stresses that may increase the appalling statistics of suicide, incarceration, violence and mental illness suffered by First Nations People in Western Australia.

The continuing connection to land, the ability to perform ceremony and maintain spiritual obligations to the land is not a lifestyle choice; it is integral to the wellbeing of the individual, their families and their communities.

We believe the Commonwealth Government, as a signatory to the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), has the duty to ensure Australian governments adhere to the principles embedded in those documents.

Article 5 of ICERD provides for civil and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to residence within the State, together with rights to housing, health, medical care, social services, education and equal participation in cultural activities.

Further implementing the plans to close between 100 and 150 Aboriginal communities in Western Australia will fall short of the accepted recommendations of the 2nd Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (86.101) to ensure that in particular indigenous peoples in

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remote areas receive adequate support services relating to accommodation and all aspects of health and education. The Western Australia Government's actions are in breach of these conventions.

The implementation of the planned closures of communities in Western Australia will violate the human rights of the indigenous peoples, the rights enshrined in article 8.2 of the UNDRIP, which stipulates that "States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for ... any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources." This action will sever over 40,000 years of the spiritual and cultural life of these people to the land. It would make the displaced people refugees in their own country.

We urge you to liaise with the Western Australian Government to provide the required consultation processes and funding model for those wishing to stay on their land to maintain and sustain traditional connection to land; or, if this is not possible, return the responsibility of overseeing remote communities to the Commonwealth Government.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julian Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting  
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia Inc.

Copies to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion  
The Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs Shayne Neumann  
Australian Greens Whip Rachel Siewert  
Senator Nova Peris